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ABSTRACT

The In-Service Teacher Training (INSET) experiment took place in September 1986 and involved 24 German teachers of English and 14 English teachers of German working together over a period of 2 days. The German teachers were participants in a 10-day course in England. Teachers worked together within the community to gather information on topics relating to environmental education, making video and audio recordings, and preparing a presentation for the large group. English teachers were required to use German in their presentations, and German teachers were required to use English. The phases of the project included familiarization and orientation, task-setting, information gathering, information processing, presentation, and evaluation. The project promotes a task-oriented, learner-centered, experience-based approach to learning and a high level of communicative interaction between participants. Participants investigate a variety of current local issues, gain insights into culture-based assumptions, and develop cross-cultural awareness. The experiment was considered successful enough to be repeated. (MSE)

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CROSS-CULTURAL INSET FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

John Roberts

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Introduction

The running of in-service courses for teachers of English from a wide range of countries is an important and interesting part of the work of the Bell Educational Trust. Conventionally, these courses have taken the form of classes on 'language improvement' (sometimes subtly disguised to avoid bruising sensitive egos), together with 'methodology' sessions, usually focusing on aspects of a 'communicative' approach.

However, over the past four or five years we have been moving away from an exclusively classroom-based approach to these courses and exploring alternative models. In conjunction with the Hessisches Institut für Lehrerfortbildung (HILF) we organised 'The Norwich Outing' (1983 and 1984) and 'The Bath Outing' (1985, 1986, 1987). These courses for secondary school teachers were designed to stimulate the participants to re-assess their received notions of English and the English through direct experience of the language and people in action.

This experiential approach to learning has been the focus of particular attention in the Bell School, Bath in recent years. It has become an integral part both of language teaching (see 'Dear Brown Eyes: Experiential learning in a project-oriented approach' by Graham Carter and Howard Thomas, *English Language Teaching Journal* 40/3 July 1986), and of in-service teacher training.

Two features of the work reported here seem to me exciting and significant. The first is the care taken to establish the principles of what is happening, and to set up a structured framework for the experiences in which the teachers are involved. It is clearly not enough to run a course like this by simply throwing the participants into an environment and hoping for the best; careful design of the tasks which the participants are asked to carry out is essential, and the stages and processes through which they are led are set out here with admirable clarity.

The second aspect which excites me is the genuine cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary nature of what is reported. The conscious incorporation of a methodology derived from environmental education is a major development in breaking down the barriers that often surround EFL and relating it more closely to concerns in other areas of education; and the involvement of groups of English teachers of

modern languages in collaborative investigation into their own 'culture' with German teachers of English investigating what was to them a foreign 'culture' is a development which breaks down barriers not only in educational terms, but in human and 'political' ones as well.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all those whose help and commitment have contributed to the work reported here. The Principal of the Bell School Bath, Steve Walters, has been instrumental in promoting the idea of experiential learning in his school, with his Director of Studies, Howard Thomas, often acting as pacemaker. It would be invidious to single out other individual members of staff at Bath when the essence of success in running these courses is team commitment and support, but it is important to recognise the work done by Dave Allan and Alan Pulverness at the Bell School Bowthorpe Hall, Norwich in developing the idea of the 'Outings' on the courses run in Norwich in 1983 and 1984. Acknowledgement is also due to collaborators from outside the Trust - to Christoph Edelhoff and Colin Oakley from HILF, who set up the first 'Outing' in Lancaster with Chris Candlin and Keith Jones, and who remain actively involved; to Nick Jones from the Centre for Urban Studies in Bristol, and to Rex Beddis from the County of Avon Education Dept.

The work described in this report has also been written up by Nick Jones and John Roberts in 'Street Reading..Street Talking. Language and cross-cultural learning through the environment' which appeared in the Bulletin of Environmental Education 195/196 in September 1987. Off-prints of this article can be obtained from me at the address given inside the front cover.

Keith Morrow
Director (Education)

February 1988

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1. Background

This INSET (In-service Teacher Training) experiment took place in Bath in September 1986 and involved 24 German teachers of English and 14 English teachers of German working together over a period of two days. The German teachers were participants on a ten-day residential course in Bath sponsored by the Hessisches Kultusministerium and co-organised by the Bell School of Languages in Bath and the Hessisches Institut für Lehrerfortbildung (HILF) in the Federal Republic of Germany. The English teachers had been released from their teaching duties for two days by the county of Avon Education Department as part of their INSET programme.

Planning started about twelve months in advance of the course and involved a series of formal and informal discussions between Christoph Edelhoff from HILF, Howard Thomas and John Roberts from the Bell School in Bath, Rex Beddis and Nick Jones from the County of Avon Education Department and Cherry Mares from Brighton Polytechnic. The three main items on the agenda of all of these planning meetings were:

- i. How to integrate this new venture into an existing overseas INSET course model developed over a period of six years by HILF.
- ii. How to present the rationale for the experiment to the education authorities in order to convince them of the value of this kind of INSET collaboration.
- iii. How to adapt techniques used in Environmental Education to facilitate cross-cultural learning in Britain by a mixed group of German and English language teachers.

2. The HILF Overseas INSET Course

Since 1980 the Hessisches Institut für Lehrerfortbildung has included one overseas course in its annual INSET programme for German teachers of English. The rationale for these courses is broadly that:

- i. They enable practising German teachers of English to re-establish contact with the culture they present and represent in the classroom.
- ii. They enable the teachers to gather authentic linguistic and cultural data which are processed into teaching materials.

The Bell Educational Trust has been closely involved in the design and implementation of these courses, first in Norwich (1983 + 1984) and subsequently in Bath (1985, 1986, 1987).

The courses follow a project-based approach involving the following stages:

Familiarization and orientation. This introductory phase involves a number of ice-breaking activities and some form of town game designed to enable participants to get to know one another and the location in which they will be working.

Task Setting. After the participants have begun the process of getting to know one another and getting to know the city or town where they will be working, they make a preliminary selection of possible project topics. Preliminary topic selection/group formation is followed by further research to discover whether the topic/group is viable. The final topic/group selection takes place about half way through the course.

Information Gathering. The prelude to this phase is an input session on interview techniques, making appointments and handling hardware during interviews. The various groups then go out on location and make audio and video recordings of their interviews and collect relevant documentary/photographic data. At the end of each information-gathering session there is an informal plenary feedback session.

Processing information. Once the raw information has been gathered, two separate processing activities begin:

- 1) preparation for a formal presentation by topic sub-groups to the other members of the group at the end of the course.

- 2) production of materials which will eventually be used in the classroom. This processing activity continues after the end of the course when the participants return to Germany.

Presentation. The presentation phase involves the use of a variety of back-up techniques (slides/OHP transparencies/posters) etc. to assist a formal oral presentation by the topic sub-group to other members of the group.

Evaluation. This phase echoes the reviewing activity which is an essential part of any learning process. A range of evaluation techniques are used during this final phase to encourage the course participants to review the experiences they have had during the course and to produce a critique of the course itself.

3. Rationale for the Experiment

It is generally accepted that two of the primary objectives of in-service teacher training are to foster the spread of new pedagogical ideas and to improve the individual teacher's knowledge of the subject he/she teaches. One measure of the success of an INSET course is the extent to which:

1. it has a positive effect on the teacher's professional performance
2. it improves the teacher's knowledge of the subject being taught

The traditional INSET course model for language teachers is a variable mixture of the following components:

LECTURES - where the teachers receive information about new pedagogical ideas and about their subject

SIMULATED LEARNING SITUATIONS - where the teachers assume the role of the learner

WORKSHOPS - where the teachers produce and evaluate new teaching materials and investigate new pedagogical and methodological aspects of language teaching.

Most foreign language teaching syllabuses include some form of instruction about the foreign culture which shapes and is shaped by the foreign language. The problematical nature of this aspect of language teaching stems largely from the fact that neither culture

nor language are static phenomena. If the information transmitted to the learner is to reflect as closely as possible the current state of the foreign language and culture there is a need for constant updating of:

- *the language, ideas and images presented in text books*
- *the teacher's personal experience of the target culture*

The success of the traditional INSET model in exposing teachers to the foreign culture is limited. It usually takes place outside the target culture and depends heavily on the selection and transmission to the teachers of information about the current state of the foreign culture. In effect the teacher is exposed to vicarious experience of the foreign culture rather than being allowed to adjust his/her knowledge of the current state of the target culture in the light of renewed first hand experience and involvement. What this INSET experiment attempted to do was to add a new ingredient to the traditional INSET mixture: direct experience. The intention was to provide an opportunity for personal enrichment by encouraging the individual teacher to investigate his/her personal response to and relationship with a number of cultural phenomena in the company of language teachers from a different cultural background. The way in which the participants' direct experience was to be structured would exemplify the methodological innovation that this particular INSET course wanted to introduce. It was believed that this route to the primary objectives of INSET (i. fostering the spread of new pedagogical ideas, ii. improving the individual teacher's knowledge of the subject) would be the more effective because the participants would have approached the learning process as genuine learners with emotional as well as intellectual responses to the outside world. The intended benefit at both the personal and the professional level to the individual language teacher of participating in this experiment was outlined as follows:

It would give the individual **English** teacher the opportunity to

- *check what is current linguistically with a native speaker*
- *get an informal up-date on current affairs in Germany*
- *explore his/her personal response to aspects of the English cultural environment*
- *investigate his/her own culture through the eyes of someone from a different cultural background*
- *gain an insight into German culture from the way in which the German teachers respond to English cultural phenomena*
- *perform formally and informally in a foreign language in front of a group of native speakers*

- experience a new methodological approach as a genuine learner
- establish contacts with a view to future school visits/school exchanges/class exchanges/materials exchanges
- discuss formally and informally the possibility of transferring the methodological approach of the course to his/her own teaching situation
- collect ideas for use on educational visits to a foreign country

The **German** teachers would benefit in the same way with the additional advantages of:

- being able to draw on the English teachers' local knowledge to help them with their information gathering during the rest of the **HILF** course
- having a passport into an English school through their direct contact with the English teachers of German
- operating in the target language in the target cultural environment

The success of the above rationale in persuading the Avon Education Authority to include the experiment in their INSET programme can be measured in the following paragraph from a circular letter about the forthcoming experiment to the Heads of Modern Languages in Avon: "We feel that the development is so significant in the improvement of language teaching, that we want to support it. The value should lie not only directly in your own school but in the direction it could give to language teaching generally. We will ensure that practical and modest resource support is made available for any implementation undertaken in your school as a result of the course." (Letter from R. Beddis, Senior Advisor: Humanities, and P. Whittington, Senior Advisor: Modern Languages, 11th July 1986)

4. Organisation of the Experiment

The way in which the two day experiment was integrated into the HILF course involved four major considerations:

1. There would be no point in introducing new impulses/information to the German teachers after they had decided on their project topics - it would only distract them from their selected task.
2. The approach of the experiment should not clash with the approach of the HILF course (task-oriented, learner-centred, experience-based).
3. The English teachers would find it very difficult to get leave of absence from their Head teachers until Day 3 of the course because Day 2 coincided with the first day of the Autumn term in Avon.
4. Days 4 and 5 of the course fell on a Saturday and Sunday; although this would have been a suitable time for the experiment, it proved problematical for the English teachers. The solution was;
 - to locate the experiment on Days 3 and 6 of the course
 - to treat the two days as part of the information-gathering stage of the HILF course
 - to adopt the same approach as the HILF course by reflecting in microcosm the six phases of the ten day course, i.e.
 - i) familiarization and orientation
 - ii) task setting
 - iii) information gathering
 - iv) processing information
 - v) presentation
 - vi) evaluation

5. Environmental Education and Cross-Cultural Learning

The main concerns of environmental education are:

- *the response of the individual to people and places*
- *the processes which shape the environment (ecological/political/economic/social)*
- *the analysis and evaluation of the relationship between people and places*
- *active participation in environmental change*

Teachers involved in environmental education have adapted a range of study techniques drawn from traditional subjects such as geography, physics, mathematics, biology etc. in order to:

- i. *stimulate the individual's response to people and places*
- ii. *promote analysis and evaluation of the relationship between people and places*
- iii. *encourage active participation in environmental training*

These techniques promote a task-oriented, learner-centred, experience-based approach to learning; in addition to this, the techniques employ group work extensively and thus promote a high level of communicative interaction between participants. The approach to learning promoted by these environmental awareness techniques broadly conformed to the approach of the HILF course (task-oriented, learner-centred, experience-based). However, for the purpose of the experiment these techniques needed some adjustment in order to exploit the variation in mother tongue and cultural background of the participants. Ten sets of street work activities were produced for the experiment aimed at fulfilling the following objectives:

- *to stimulate affective and intellectual responses to people and places*
- *to stimulate communication between groups of language teachers from different cultural backgrounds*
- *to provide the opportunity for two groups from different cultural background to investigate a variety of current local issues*
- *to provide the opportunity for getting insights into culture based assumptions*
- *to develop greater cross-cultural awareness*

It was assumed that the participants' linguistic competence in which-

ever language the groups chose to use (the decision was left to individuals to negotiate) was at a level which did not require any pre-task language input - in some cases groups were given a reference sheet with a list of German and English phrases which might be useful in carrying out their task. The only directive concerning language used was that the German teachers should use English in their formal presentation and the English teachers should use German. The tasks included in each set of activities were grouped in three phases:

Phase 1. Sensing

People are in the habit of forming judgements about their surroundings; it is a natural activity which is part of everyday experience. If this experience is shared with others, it provides the basis for exchanging information and opinions, sharing perceptions and agreeing priorities and also provides the subject matter that the learner wishes to communicate.

During this initial activity phase for the participants, the aim was to encourage the participants to share their responses to the sights, sounds and smells they experienced. An opportunity for the formation of individual value judgements was built into all of the environmental awareness activities used in this phase; then the group was asked to reach a unanimous decision about the shared experience. The intention was to promote as much exchange of opinion and debate as possible within the group. Here are two examples of techniques used to achieve this:

1. *Make a unanimous group decision as to which is the most important building in your area.*
2. *When you arrive in your area, follow the trail on the map and stop at the places numbered 1-6. Look around you and:*
 - *discuss what you like and dislike about the place*
 - *complete the scorecard (0=Bad - 10=Good)*

LITTER/POLLUTION

NOISE

GRAFFITI

LANDSCAPING

MAINTENANCE

TOTAL SCORE

1	2	3	4	5	6

By discussing these aspects of the environment it was hoped that the participants would gain insights into the cultural assumptions that informed their choices.

Phase 2. Topic

This phase involved the participants in collecting data from the urban environment. It was intended as a lead-in phase in which participants homed in on various factors which played a part in the issue: e.g. the issue of busking was approached by asking participants at the topic stage to record the movement patterns of people in an open pedestrian area. The pedestrian area was chosen because it is very popular with buskers and groups of onlookers have the habit of crowding around them. Whether or not this crowding causes "an obstruction on a public thoroughfare" is one of the most hotly disputed aspects of the busking issue.

Whenever possible at this stage the differences between the home environment of the German teachers and the environment the groups were working in were highlighted; in this way we hoped to provide the stimulus for both German and English participants to investigate cultural differences.

For example, one group working in a street which was being improved and redeveloped was asked to sketch as many different types of chimney pot as they could find; sketching was chosen because it is an activity which heightens visual awareness. The reason for choosing chimney pots was that they are prominent

features of the skyline in Britain but are not very much in evidence in Germany where central heating flues predominate. The intention was not only to draw attention to the current cultural differences but also to help the participants "read" the street and discover its salient characteristics.

Phase 3. Local Environmental Issues

These might involve topics such as traffic, property development, changes in land use, pollution etc., which are likely to animate local people and thus ensure a lively and spontaneous response to enquiries by the learner. The fact that the issues we chose were still unresolved added a live problem-solving element to the activity - the search for a solution was likely to provide the learners with a further authentic communicative purpose.

Local knowledge is necessary in order to pinpoint more than one or two issues. On this occasion the most contentious current issues included busking in the city centre and football hooliganism.

6. The Two-Day Experiment

The sequence of activities during the two days echoed the main phases of the HILF course.

Familiarisation and Orientation

Some of the participants began to get to know one another when about half of the Avon teachers arrived for tea on Thursday afternoon - the German teachers were in the process of preparing their presentations based on the information they had gathered in Bath that day and the English teachers attached themselves to the presentation groups. A more formal familiarisation process took place in the plenary session on Friday morning consisting of:-

- a brief general introduction to the context of the experiment
- an ice-breaking activity designed to promote interaction between all members of the group and provide an opportunity to get to know one another.

The process of getting-to-know-one-another continued throughout Day 1. The familiarisation also involved getting to know the environment in which they were working and how to orientate themselves within it.

Task Setting

This phase was extremely brief and involved:

1. Dividing the participants into ten groups of three or four participants.
2. A short introduction to the activities that the participants were going to carry out in Bath during the day.
3. Allocation of sets of activities to the ten street work groups.

Information-gathering

This phase involved the participants in spending a considerable part of the first day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. carrying out their tasks in the city. There was a data collection element in all of the sets of activities but the most important aspect of this phase was the direct experience for the participants of their real environment and the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds - the process took precedence over the product.

Processing Information

When the groups returned to the conference rooms there was an opportunity to compare notes with members of other groups over tea. The groups then began to discuss how they were going to organise their group presentation on Day 2 of the experiment. The preparation of group presentations continued until 11.00 on Day 2. This involved

1. producing a poster display describing what the group had done and showing the data they had collected
2. giving a ten-minute oral presentation in German or English of the group's activities.

Presentation

During this phase the ten street work groups were divided into two sub-groups - each street work group made its presentation to members of its sub-group. After each presentation there was short question-and-answer session.

Evaluation

Feedback and evaluation concerning the activities took place naturally and informally throughout the course. The purpose of formalising the process in the two final evaluation activities was to maximise the exchange of opinion and information in a large group of people and arrive at a genuine consensus of opinion about the experiment. The first activity was a snowball evaluation: in the first round of this activity the participants were asked to work in pairs and agree on five comments that they wanted to make about the experiment; in the second round, groups of four went through the same process which was repeated a third time with groups of eight. At this stage the groups were asked to write their five comments on an OHP transparency and present them in plenary session.

The evaluation phase concluded with an open forum chaired by Peter Strevens, Director-General of the Bell Educational Trust. Participants were invited to consider what conclusions could be drawn from the 2-day experiment with reference to:

- *classroom teaching*
- *school exchanges and study visits abroad*
- *in-service teacher training*

Conclusion

The opinions expressed in the evaluation phase revealed a high degree of enthusiasm from the participants. However, the success of the experiment should not be measured solely in terms of the participants' positive response to the activities. The personal contacts made between the English and German teachers were followed up in a variety of ways both during and after the ten-day course:

- *two project groups on the HILF course chose "Aspects of British School Life" as their project topic and filmed extensive interviews in the school of one of the English participants in the experiment*
- *a materials exchange was set up between a school in Bath and one near Frankfurt*
- *a number of German teachers have brought and are planning to bring groups of pupils to Bristol and Bath to carry out similar environmental activities with English pupils*

The most important indications of the success of the experiment are, arguably

1. the extent to which the English and German participants were affected by and learned from their cross-cultural experience
2. the extent to which this cross-cultural learning has had a positive effect on their approach to their work as teachers

It was beyond the scope of this experiment to undertake formal monitoring of the effects of the course on teacher performance. However, informal monitoring has indicated that the participants have benefited in the long term from the experiment in both professional and personal terms.

A significant indication of the success of the course in the eyes of the sponsoring authorities was the decision by HILF to ask the Bell School, Bath to mount a similar course in 1987; in addition to this the Bell School, Bath was asked to organize a slightly shorter course along similar lines for a mixed group of German and Danish teachers of English in 1987. This course was co-sponsored by die Gesellschaft zur Förderung des Englischunterrichts an Gesamtschulen and Sprogsam. These courses have led to plans for a long-term project to evaluate formally the effectiveness of cross-cultural INSET for modern-language teachers.

John Roberts
Bath, January 1988

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